**1 Thessalonians 4:1-8**

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**A Call To Personal Purity**

***1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. 7 For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. 8 So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.***

* Having begun his letter to the Thessalonians by commending them for the reputation they had gained by being faithful imitators of the Lord Jesus in chapter one . . .
  + In chapters 2 and 3 Paul is then compelled to make a defense of himself from the accusations of his enemies that he was using his relationship with the Thessalonians to enrich himself.
  + Paul also uses chapters 2 and 3 to explain the events that had happened after his departure from them up to the time that Timothy had returned and given Paul his glowing report of the condition of the Thessalonian church.

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* Now, in chapters 4 and 5 of this letter we come **the section of instruction and exhortation**. Here in chapters 4 and 5 we find **five distinct topics of instruction . . .**

1. In 4:1-12 we have Paul’s instruction regarding **proper Christian living**.
2. In 4:13-18 we have Paul’s instruction **concerning what happens to those Christians who die before the return of the Lord for His church**.
3. In 5:1-11 we have Paul’s exhortation **to be vigilant and looking for the Lord’s return**.
4. In 5:12-15 we have very practical **instruction regarding proper church order**.
5. In 5:16-24 Paul closes with a final section of **practical instruction regarding personal holiness and proper Christian living**.

* This morning we will begin examining the first part of Paul’s instruction regarding proper Christian living.

**A confusing transitional adverb**

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***1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus***

* In the opening of chapter 4 many English translations begin with the word ***finally***.
  + Unfortunately the use of the word ***finally*** implies the idea of “in conclusion.” We see this same translation difficulty in Philippians 3:1, which occurs barely halfway through the letter.
  + A better translation of the Greek word *loipon* would be “**furthermore**.” The Greek word, used in both Philippians 3:1 and here in 1 Thessalonians 4:1 indicates a transition of subject as Paul begins this section of instruction and exhortation.

**A disclaimer— “This bears repeating”**

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***1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.***

* In beginning this two chapter section of instruction and exhortation Paul begins with a statement that qualifies as **a disclaimer** . . . ***Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.***
* I’m sure the translators had a fun time translating this verse because it is so grammatically broken and irregular.
  + Here in v. 1 Paul begins this section of instruction by saying, in effect, **I am about to exhort and instruct you in regard to things that I have already taught you and I know you are already doing. But this instruction is of such vital importance that it bears repeating so that you will appreciate its importance all the more.**
* With this disclaimer, Paul is making it clear that he knows from Timothy’s report that they were living godly lives. But the instruction he wishes to emphasize to them is of such importance and critical to living the Christian life that he must repeat it, for their sakes.
* Here in v. 1 Paul conveys the importance of what he is about to say by telling the Thessalonians that he both ***requests and exhorts* them *in the Lord Jesus***.
  + The word ***request*** is used to indicate that Paul is asking the question, **“will you do these things?”** while the word ***exhort*** or **urge** indicates **Paul’s expectation of a rousing, affirmative response.**
  + In effect, Paul is saying . . . “**what I am about to say is of the utmost importance. Will you do all that I am about to instruct you to do?”**
* And the subject that Paul is ***requesting and exhorting*** their obedience to is in regard ***to how you ought to walk and please God***.

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* + Here in this statement we find a significant point of instruction found throughout the epistles . . . the theme of ***walking* the Christian life**.
* The Greek word for ***walk*** is *peripateō*, meaning “to make one’s way” or “to conduct oneself.” Metaphorically, the word *peripateō* describes “the habitual pattern of one’s life.”

* + The English translation, ***walk***, is a great word because it so perfectly describes the Christian life as **a journey.** And, as some scholar have also pointed out, **our Christian journey is a marathon, not a sprint.** The Christian life is an endurance test.

* + - In describing the Christian life as a ***walk***,we correctly come to understand that our lives are **not static or stationary**. We proceed in life from moment to moment . . . from event to event. And at every moment along the path of our lives we are presented . . . or confronted, if you will . . . with opportunities and decisions.
    - Many decisions are seemingly insignificant . . . do I have spaghetti or pizza for breakfast?
    - But other decisions are significant. Do it obey Christ and do what I know I should do, or do I give in to the desires of my flesh and do what I know I shouldn’t do? **In other words, do I choose to obey God or do I choose to sin?**
  + And the decisions we make daily in choosing to obey or choosing to sin comprise “the habitual pattern of our life.”
* Last week I showed you how important the word ***love*** is in Scripture . . . how it is found throughout the New Testament in the teaching of every writer.
  + Well, the word ***walk*** is another significant word we find throughout the New Testament. And the reason the word ***walk*** is so important is because **how we walk defines whether we are true believers or false professors.**
  + The concept of **walking the Christian life** is a main theme of John’s first epistle. Consider the following verses . . .

***1 John 1:6-7— 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.***

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***1 John 2:6— the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.***

* + In other words, **the person who says he or she is a Christian should *walk in the same way* Christ *walked***.
    - You’ve heard the saying, “if it looks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, and walks like a duck . . .”
    - Well, “if you **look** like an unbeliever, and **talk** like an unbeliever, and **walk** like an unbeliever . . . **you’re an unbeliever!, no matter what you may claim to be.”**
* The bottom line is this . . . **if you claim to be a believer and yet walk like an unbeliever, your habitual manner of life betrays what you truly are. You can’t habitually walk like a sinner and be a saint.**

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* But, fortunately, while Paul ***requests and exhorts*** the Thessalonians to heed and obey his instruction regarding how they ***ought to walk and please God***, he has the full expectation that **they will *walk and please God*** because, as he adds, parenthetically, in v. 1 . . . ***(just as you actually do walk)***.
  + Having received Timothy’s report, Paul had rejoiced to hear that the Thessalonian church was thriving. They actually were living obedient Christian lives that we **pleasing to God**.
  + But, at the same time, Paul also knew that living the Christian life . . . just like Pilgrim’s Progress . . . was fraught with danger and difficulty, to the point that **we can never let our guard down, for fear of falling into disobedience and sin.**
* Thus, knowing the danger that every Christian is in, Paul feels it necessary to instruct the Thessalonians, so that **they will excel still more**.

**The authority with which Paul speaks**

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***2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.***

* Then, having stated **why** he was reiterating instruction that he knew they had heard and were living by, in v. 2 Paul then reminds the Thessalonian readers of the authority with which he speaks . . . ***For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.***
* Here in v. 2 the word ***commandments*** is not the usual word that refers to **the 10 commandments** or **the commandments of God**.
  + The word Paul uses here . . . *paraggelia . . .* is only used **4 times** in the New Testament. The word is **a military term** used of the command given to a subordinate by a superior.
  + Here in this verse Paul identifies himself as a superior acting under the authority of his superior . . . ***the Lord Jesus***.
    - In military terms, Jesus is the General, having given Paul, His Lieutenant, the authority to issue commands under His name to the Thessalonians . . . the Privates.
* **Paul’s purpose in using this word is to convey the authority that he has.** When he was with them, he did not speak under his own authority, but under the authority given to him by the Lord Jesus. And having this authority, his commands carried the weight as if they had come from the Lord Jesus directly.

**What is Sanctification?**

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***v. 3— For this is the will of God, your sanctification***

* Then, in v. 3 Paul begins to present his practical instruction to the Thessalonians. He begins with the comprehensive statement . . . ***For this is the will of God, your sanctification***.
  + The word ***sanctification*** . . . the Greek word *hagiasmos . . .* is a common word in the Christian vernacular. We’ve all heard the term and most of us use it.
  + The English word **sanctification** is from the root word *hagios*, meaning “holy,” *hagiosmos* means “to consecrate or to make pure.” Literally, **“to** **sanctify” means to set apart as holy.**
  + Most people associate the word **sanctification** with instruction on how to be a “good Christian.” We understand that **sanctification is most commonly associated with becoming “more Christ-like in our behavior.”**
  + But what most of us don’t realize is that the subject of **sanctification** is a complex and significant theological subject. In fact, the study of **sanctification** is a significant section in the study of **soteriology . . . the theological study of the doctrine of salvation.**
  + Sanctification is an integral part of the entire process of salvation.
* There are, in fact, **three aspects of sanctification** . . . **positional, progressive and ultimate sanctification**. These three aspects of sanctification can be seen as corresponding to our **past, present and future**.

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* The first step in our being “set apart as holy” is our **Positional sanctification. Positional sanctification** is the declaration that **at the moment of salvation**, we are sanctified or set apart **positionally**; that is, in a single moment, when we receive saving faith, we are immediately saved from the ultimate penalty of sin.
  + **Positional sanctification** is **a one-time act of the Holy Spirit** on the hearts of unbelievers whom He has chosen for salvation from sin.
  + **Positional sanctification** also **changes our position** from being sinners deserving of God’s wrath to the position of being beloved children of the Father.
  + For Christians, positional sanctification is a past event because it is an event that **occurred at the moment that we were saved**.
* On the other end of the timeline is our **ultimate sanctification. Ultimate sanctification** will occur in glory. Ultimate sanctification is the **future glorification of the believer . . . the eternal state of glory in heaven.**
* But between our **positional sanctification** and our **ultimate sanctification** is the present time of **progressive sanctification** . . . our Christian life here on the earth.
  + As the term states, our present Christian lives are **progressive** in holiness. We are in the process . . . every day . . . of progressively being conformed and transformed by the Holy Spirit.
    - We are becoming more Christ-like as we “progress” toward our **ultimate state of glorification.**
    - As A.T. Robertson states, progressive sanctification is “a life process of consecration, not an instantaneous act.”

***1 Thessalonians 4:3-5— 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;***

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* Here in 1 Thessalonians 4 the apostle Paul is focusing, specifically, on the **progressive** aspect of their **sanctification** . . . their growing in godliness and obedience to the instruction they had received from the Lord through the ministry of Paul.
* And as Paul instructs here in this opening section of chapter 4, we see that **Paul’s primary focus in regard to their sanctification is in regard to sexual sin.**
* Here in v. 3 Paul refers to ***sexual immorality***, which is translated from the Greek word *porneia*, from which we get out English word **“pornography,”** which are sexually immoral images.
* As we read this passage, we have to keep in mind that **sexual immorality was rampant among the Gentiles during this time.**
  + In fact, if you know the history of the Roman Empire, you know that **the demise of the Roman Empire was not by an invading army, but** **it imploded under the weight of its own immorality.**
    - One historian put it this way . . . “unlimited sexual license” was characteristic of and the eventual cause of the downfall of ancient Rome.
* So, remembering that the Thessalonians were new believers, Paul knew that old habits and desires would be difficult to overcome.

* + While we don’t know the details of what was going on in the Thessalonian church, we do have an historical record of the immorality that persisted within the Corinthian church as some of the new believers there fell back into their previously immoral practices.
* We have to understand the level of immorality that existed in the first century. The Greeks and the Romans were pagans that worshipped mythological gods. And the gods of mythology were like the people who worshipped them . . . evil and grossly immoral.
  + **That’s what made idol-worship so enticing . . . immorality was not merely tolerated, it was encouraged.**
  + Within the temples of the Greek and Roman gods sexual immorality was the manner in which they worshipped. Temple prostitutes were the priestesses. To “worship” in the pagan temple meant going to see the temple “priestess” for a night of debauchery.
* But the excessive immorality of the Romans and Greeks was not confined to their immoral temple worship. The Romans and the Greeks practiced all other forms of immorality and perversion. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Paul highlights some of the practices . . .

***1 Corinthians 6:9-11— 9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.***

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* Knowing that old, lustful habits are difficult to break, Paul was rightfully concerned about the possibility of the Thessalonians falling back into their old ways. That is why Paul exhorts them in v. 4-5 . . . ***4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God***.
  + Being surrounded by friends and neighbors who continued in their immoral lifestyles, the Thessalonians would have found it difficult not to be enticed back to their former manner of life.
* Then, in what I believe is Paul’s concern for the delicate nature of this subject, v. 6 presents us with a difficult interpretive question. In v. 6 Paul states . . . ***and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter***.

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* + There is disagreement among scholars regarding what ***“matter”*** Paul is talking about here. Some believe that because Paul is speaking on **not *transgressing and defrauding a brother*** that Paul is referring to unethical and corrupt business practices . . . a problem that also existed in the ancient world.
  + But others, including me, believe that Paul is expounding . . . ever so delicately . . . on the subject of immorality.
    - Because sexual immorality was so pervasive in the ancient world, adultery was also quite common.
    - Therefore, I believe that what Paul is saying here in v. 6, as delicately as he can, is that **adultery, which was quite common, was a *“matter”* in which a man could “transgress and defraud his brother” of what was rightfully his.**
    - In other words, even though adultery was commonly practiced, it was the literally robbery of one marital partner by the other when he or she chose to commit adultery.
    - And Paul’s point here in v. 6 is that this practice could not be allowed to occur among professing Christians.
* Paul then goes on in v. 6 to state the consequences upon those who disobey this admonition . . . ***because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.***

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* + Here in v. 6 Paul reveals to us that he had previously ***solemnly warned*** the Thessalonians about the need to **abstain from sexual immorality**, and that if they disobeyed this instruction, they would be liable to God, who is ***the avenger of all these things***.
  + In other words, someone who disobeys this instruction is subject to the justice of God in response.
* Here in v. 6 Paul is cautioning the Thessalonians against any inclination they might have to return to some of their old ways . . . specifically, to those ways that are in direct conflict with what Paul had taught them concerning morality and godliness.

**“Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve . . . .”**

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***1 Thessalonians 4:7-8— 7 For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. 8 So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.***

* Then, to emphasize this point, in v. 7-8 Paul reminds the Thessalonians . . . ***7 For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. 8 So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.***
* With this statement here in v. 7-8, Paul is reminding the Thessalonians that **the calling of God and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit is for the purpose of personal purity**.
  + And if a professing Christian fails to heed this instruction, that professing Christian is ***rejecting God, who gives His Holy Spirit to you***.

**The solemn warning of 1 Thessalonians 4:8**

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***8 So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.***

* This statement in v. 8 should not be missed or taken lightly. Paul is explicitly stating that **persisting in impure behavior and sexual immorality is a direct and blatant rejection of the Holy Spirit in your life.**
  + **And if you are a true believer, the Holy Spirit will chastise you for your disobedience.**
  + **But if you are not a true believer, the Holy Spirit will allow you to continue in your disobedience until you fall away . . . like the seed that fell among the thorns and was choked out and died.**
* While Paul’s primary concern for the Thessalonians was their risk of falling into or back into sexual immorality, the lesson here is that **if we persist in any sinful behavior and refuse to repent, we will either be disciplined by the Holy Spirit or we will be allowed to fall away in unbelief.**
  + Therefore, knowing these things, it will be so much better for us if we strive to obey God and live according to His statutes.

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* As we consider the message of Paul this morning, I want to remind you that this instruction is for believers.
  + Yes, it is applicable to all men . . . that we should all strive to flee from immorality. But unbelievers don’t obey this instruction because they can’t and they don’t want to. They love their sin.
  + **This instruction to** ***abstain from sexual immorality*** **is for the church**. Our role is not to police others outside the church. We must take care of our own house before pointing out where someone else’s house needs cleaning.

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* I want to close this message with the warning of Joshua to the Israelites when they had entered into the Land of Israel.
  + Wishing to impress upon the Israelites of the necessity of obedience to God and how their forefathers had been grossly disobedient, and were punished for it, Joshua closes his exhortation to the nation with this admonition . . .

***Joshua 24:15— "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."***